

Health, Wealth and Innovation: An International Conference on Digital Health

Scotland & Digital Health: Moray Leading the World

Richard Lochhead MSP

Thank you for that kind introduction.

It's a real pleasure to be here today to take part in what I believe we will look back on one day as a seminal event in the development of digital health in Scotland and Moray.

This Conference is about the local and global potential of digital health and I am particularly delighted that we have visitors from across the world here today in Forres, and I offer you all a warm Scottish welcome and trust you are enjoying the hospitality that this area is renowned for.

Please ensure that when you return home that you that your suitcases are filled not only with important conference papers but some Speyside malt whisky, perhaps some local shortbread, and not forgetting some cashmere from the world famous Johnstone's of Elgin!

There are indeed people here from far and wide. We have delegates from China and Mozambique, with Singapore & Bhutan watching from afar!

The delegates list for this conference is very impressive indeed illustrating that the issue we are discussing are common to all countries.

I congratulate the organisers in bringing together such high calibre individuals to share experiences, debate the future and discuss how we can use modern technology and innovation to improve healthcare throughout the world.

This week will hopefully mark the beginning of a new relationship between our respective countries and will forge new links between areas of expertise in digital healthcare.

If we can combine our expertise, share our knowledge, and work in collaboration, then, together, I'm confident we can deal with many of the significant challenges our respective societies face at a time when the world population is set to increase by 50% by 2030.

I firmly believe that today also marks a new chapter in Moray's story because this pioneering event illustrates that Moray is at the forefront of Digital Health innovations in Scotland and the world.

Forres and Moray have of course already played a significant role in history.

The contribution of the ancient pictis is represented by Sueno's Stone that is on display only a few hundreds yards from here, dating back to the end of the first millennium AD and described as the most remarkable sculptured monument in these islands – an innovation in its day!

And this area was the base for the first Scottish kings with Shakespear's play Macbeth locating Duncan's castle here in Forres – they used Moray as a test bed for all kinds of nasty things!

And more recently we have played a role in Scotland's industrial history with the development of our globally successful and booming whisky industry and wider food and drink sectors.

Every chapter of our history has been written by people driven by ambition, or by necessity due to challenging circumstances.

And it's no different today.

Speaking as a politician, and as a Government Minister, I can say that we are ambitious for our health service but we recognise the significant challenges that lie ahead.

So a combination of ambition and necessity means that we need to innovate more than ever if we want to maintain and hopefully improve the standards of healthcare, locally, nationally and globally.

I mentioned that the world's population will increase dramatically in the coming decades.

This is a global phenomenon but like in many countries here in Scotland our changing demographics presents enormous challenges.

Take the significant and sustained rise in the number of older people over the next decade and beyond.

The Registrar of Scotland projects that for every year to 2021 the over 75 age group will expand by around 10,000 people every year!

I'm told this means that if we don't change the way we deliver care, we will require around 1800 more beds by the end of this decade – that's the equivalent of three additional District General Hospitals in Scotland, and by the 2030s we would need 10 new hospitals.

The demands of an ageing demographic are absolutely not limited to hospitals.

The same projections show that more than 20,000 extra people would need to be supported by the end of this decade, and by the 2030s a staggering 83,000 extra people would be straining our existing services.

Governments face these challenges at a time when the world's economy is turbulent and when many Governments including here in Europe struggle to balance budgets or whose economies are stagnant.

Our Scottish Government faces the same difficult choices as many other Governments over how to distribute ever tightening budgets between competing and rising demands, and these figures illustrate the scale of the challenge we face.

In Scotland, we have a population of five million people, but I am sure for those of you from countries with far greater populations, your own Governments face similar dilemmas.

The Scottish Government therefore recognises that encouraging innovation in the health service is more important than ever before.

We have to be more smart when deploying our limited resources if we are to ensure that our National Health Service is fit for purpose and can continue delivering for a growing and ageing population.

And here in Moray some leading health professionals and the wider health community had the foresight to see the opportunities presented by technology. And that's what has led us to be there today.

Moray is ready to offer solutions and we are determined to play our part and become an international centre of excellence in digital healthcare.

Indeed, it is highly significant, and speaks volumes about Moray's growing reputation in this field, that Misha Kay has chosen Moray to make his announcement on behalf of the World Health Organisation – a clear recognition that Moray is playing a pivotal role in developing the world's digital healthcare expertise.

Our health professionals recognised early on the opportunities presented by the internet and interactive services.

When I was first elected Moray's MSP in 2006, according to Wikipedia which I accessed on the internet last night, 18% of the world's population used the internet. By the end of last year, the figure had nearly doubled to 35% with the biggest increases being registered in Africa and Asia.

So, our local health community in Moray quite rightly saw the massive potential for changing the way in which healthcare is delivered.

In the age of Google, Facebook, Youtube etc, we can deliver healthcare over the internet.

And we know the public are thinking likewise. I am told that local researcher Julia Moreland who presented to Harvard Medical School in Boston only yesterday revealed that 69% of patients visiting local GP practices that she surveyed access health information on the internet.

A fascinating statistic but one that I find makes perfect sense given my family often do that these days! And although we are not yet cyber-condriacs, Julia is quite right to highlight that there is a need to ensure the internet provides accurate information and patients receive advice they can trust. The internet must be safe and the self-mis-diagnosis is clearly an issue.

However, there is no doubt that patients receiving advice, treatment or providing feedback over the internet brings multiple benefits.

Self-care can reduce the need to visit the local GP practice or hospital. This reduces pressure on the health service, cuts paperwork, and saves time and money for patients and the public sector. And it encourages patients to be treated at home or in their community.

And it promotes preventative care.

The Healthy Outlook initiative is a fantastic case study in this regard.

Moray Community Health and Social Care Partnership offers the Met Office Outlook COPD Forecast alert service.

The service helps patients perhaps with chronic bronchitis or emphysema manage their conditions by warning them of increased risk to their health. Current evidence indicates that the service can help reduce unplanned NHS contact and admissions by around 20%.

A survey of Moray patients who registered for the service found that there had been a potential saving of around 40 emergency admissions.

There are many other examples out there that no doubt will be discussed at this conference.

I am particularly delighted that Professor DK Arvind from whom you will hear later is working in Moray at a local medical practice carrying out clinical studies with patients in the community involving wireless sensor patches to measure continuously respiratory rates – another example of technology promoting self-care.

This illustrates how digital health can deliver better patient care, allow patients to take more control of their own care reducing pressure on the NHS. A win-win all round.

Moray is the ideal test bed for developing digital health innovation.

As local MSP, I often reflect that Moray is Scotland in miniature!

Moray's coastal villages stretch along the Moray Firth but we go in land to the Cairngorm mountains - and we have the fertile lands of the Laich of Moray but also the higher ground of very rural Upper Speyside from where the water of life flows – what is known locally as Scotch whisky!

However, Upper Speyside is sparsely populated and people can feel isolated.

So, when we take that into account with the towns of Forres and Buckie and our capital city of Elgin - we have the perfect mix of urban and rural.

And we have the people.

Not just plenty of willing patients, but leading health professionals who have developed expertise in the use of information and communication technology to deliver healthcare.

They are grasping the opportunities presented by e-health to deliver benefits for patients, and the public sector.

Our very own Professor Grant Cumming and his colleagues are the latest in a long line of leading and creative thinkers, and there are many in this room from across the world, to whom we owe a great debt.

It is their vision that will provide people with a better quality of life and the quality healthcare they need and expect in the 21st century.

In Moray, we also benefit from a partnership approach and the kind of collaboration that is absolutely essential to deliver the outcomes we all want to see.

As one of Scotland's smaller authorities, it is easier to quickly implement new ideas, and new technologies, across the local population. And we benefit from a full health system, from hospital to primary care, practitioners linked closely with social care.

And this partnership is keen to grasp the opportunities offered by digital health.

This joined up approach has already secured funding the first rural Life Sciences centre in Europe currently being constructed along the road in Elgin at the Moray College which is part of the University of the Highlands & Islands.

To commemorate Elgin's link with one of the world's most famous inventions the building has been named the Alexander Graham Bell Centre.

The inventor of the telephone lived and worked in Elgin for a few years before emigrating to Canada. Some say he came up with the idea of the telephone in front of the mirror in his room in Elgin.

If 19th century Moray did play a small a role in one of the world's most important inventions, it's only right that Alexander Graham Bell should be associated with the invention of new system of healthcare using communications technology in the 21st century!

And the Scottish Government recently recognised Moray's potential to lead the world in digital healthcare when Forres was granted life sciences enterprise zone status with £10m worth of support to put in place in the necessary infrastructure.

And we have already seen private sector investment as life sciences companies begin to locate in Moray.

Together these announcements, and events like this conference, have well and truly put Moray on the map as an international centre of excellence for digital health – a sector that is delivering high value jobs locally,

attracting household names to Moray and kicking off a much needed economic boom. After all, health is a £5 trillion pound business!

Nationally, the Scottish Government is already ahead of the game in recognising the potential of digital health.

In 2010, Scotland's first national telehealth strategy was published.

This prioritised the delivery of four national clinical programmes: Stroke, Paediatrics, Mental Health and Long Term Conditions.

So over the past two years, we have seen developments such as the establishment of Stroke consultation cover from consultants in NHS Lanarkshire in central Scotland to support tele-rehabilitation for patients in the Western Isles – in the north of Scotland!

In terms of mental health, we have seen the development of Video Conferencing facilities between specialist Mental Health units and a number of Scottish prisons to support the delivery of mental health services to the prison population.

And Scotland is recognised as one of the very few nations that has a national strategy for telehealth and telecare and has invested in the development of a national resource, the Scottish Centre for Telehealth and Telecare, hosted by our pioneering NHS 24 service.

As a result, Scotland is now working closely with the European Commission in the development and design of one of their flagship developments, the European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing.

This European initiative recognises the major societal challenges being faced by all of Europe's regions – an ageing population, a reducing workforce, the increase in long term health conditions, and the need to redesign our health and care systems to deliver sustainable services in the future.

That encapsulates the key challenges we face today.

To face these 21st century challenges, we need to use 21st century technology – technology that our parents could have only dreamed of when starting out in life.

Just as digital technology and the internet has transformed our daily lives: how we communicate, access knowledge, conduct business and enjoy entertainment – it is transforming how we care for ourselves and how we receive care from others.

I can see the benefits for my constituents here in Moray and for my fellow Scots just as I can see the benefits for the rest of the world and fellow citizens everywhere.

The potential is huge and just as Moray is helping to lead the way, each and every person in this room is leading the way in their own professions, workplaces and their own countries.

There are few aspirations more important than improving and saving lives.

The digital world in which we live offers you all new and exciting tools to use in your vocation.

The science fiction writer Asimov Isacc said:

“It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in today’s society..This, in turn, means that our statesmen, our businessmen, our everyman must take on a science fictional way of thinking.”

Given today’s world of smart phones, nanotechnology, digital & wireless communication and so on, we are indeed now thinking in a science fictional way, so our ambition can be limitless.

So I wish to I wish you all well with your endeavours.

And I wish you all a successful and fruitful conference.

Thank you.

Monday 17th September 2012